

Much ado about Nothingness

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

The Neverending Story, despite all the jokes, never *did* because we (the global community) continue to read the intriguing leather-bound tome protected by its mystical Auryn medallion, thereby sustaining Fantasia, and through our imagination evolving the world of its inhabitants. Creativity, passion, love and a limitless sense of wonder serve as their best defence against encroachment from eternal 'Nothingness'. A metaphysical entity or concept representing brain-dead apathy, depicted as a primordial whirlpool of smoke and mirrors. Well, you saw what it did to poor Artax when he succumbed to the Sadness (TM) in that swamp.



"And nothing ever happens, nothing happens at all. The needle returns to the start of the song and we all sing along like before. And we'll all be lonely tonight and lonely tomorrow."

As a kid I embraced this half-baked pseudo-philosophy (Del Amitri too!), losing myself in a surreal, flamboyant world (apparently inspired in part by Greek mythology and Alice in Wonderland) populated by...

Incessantly nattering gnomes, a loyal, puppyfied, flying 'luck dragon', backwards Rockbiter, malevolent talking wolf, an ancient, mountain-sized depressed turtle, snail-racing 'Tinys', forlorn sentient trees, shape-shifters, bat-riding 'Nighthobs', and of course, the Childlike Empress who desperately called upon the assistance of the reader/viewer to preserve their very existence. *We* were as significant a part of the puzzle as anyone else, that's what makes The Neverending Story so special.

Rockbiter: Bastian, in your world, if the Neverending Story is fading, no child will ever know about Junior.

Atreyu: They will never ride the prairie with me?

Falkor: And they'll never ride through the clouds with me?



Rockbiter: If humans forget about us, nobody will think of fun things for Junior to do.

Bastian Bux: NO!

(Bastian goes silent for a few seconds)

Bastian Bux: We won't let that happen.

Granted, next to Star Wars – seven years old by this stage – Falkor and co. may have looked like something the Spitting Image crew knocked together in an afternoon. It didn't matter! When you wholly identify with the protagonist and *want* to believe, your imagination plugs the gaps. That's the magic of cinema at work. Partly I think it gripped children

because it occupies that niche between high and low fantasy – we begin in the real world, are introduced to an alien alternative, and regularly flip back and forth between the two, blurring reality and the boundaries of possibility. Even as kids we assumed we'd seen it all, until something fresh came along to shake the silly notion from our naive minds.

I can see why it wouldn't appeal to everyone, especially if they'd long since passed the age of wide-eyed bewilderment that's often required to suspend disbelief in the absurd. Roger Ebert never lost that gift.



"In most movies, this quest would be told in a straightforward way, without the surrounding story about the other little boy who is reading the book.

But 'The NeverEnding Story' is about the unfolding of a story, and so the framing device of the kid hidden in his school attic, breathlessly turning the pages, is interesting. It lets kids know that the story isn't just

somehow happening, that storytelling is a neverending act of the imagination."

Others were perhaps never blessed with this gift to begin with. Film critic Vincent Canby dismissed - what to me seemed like an ambitious, epic parable - as a "graceless, humorless fantasy for children" that "sounded like 'The Pre-Teenager's Guide to Existentialism'".



Falkor - the flying golden retriever/dragon hybrid - he dismissed as "an impractical bathmat", branding the special effects as "tacky". Obviously he wasn't wearing the pre-pubescent equivalent of beer goggles when he reviewed it. In retrospect, he does make a fair point with regards to the efficacy of the technology engaged.

Briefly, the story revolves around Bastian, a downtrodden, socially awkward bookworm who - on the run from school bullies - takes sanctuary in an antique book emporium. There he discovers an archaically unconventional book entitled, 'The Neverending Story'. Immediately enchanted by it, he's compelled to steal the book (accidentally on purpose made too tempting to resist), stowing away in the musty school attic to devour it from cover to cover (were that even possible!). Bastian is enthralled by the pitiful plight of the second protagonist, an American Indian boy named Atreyu, and wholeheartedly roots for his success in finding a cure for the Childlike Empress' predicament.



As he reads, Bastian experiences Atreyu's journey along with him, eventually the two worlds colliding when called upon to be the solution. A human possessing infinite imagination is required to visit Fantasia and bestow the Childlike Empress - "our only hope" - with a name of his choice. 'Moonchild' in case you're wondering and couldn't decipher it from his windswept scream.



Making sense of her title, she's actually ageless, older than any living being in Fantasia, though for some reason needs a fresh new name every so often or else she'll fade away from her Ivory Tower homestead and Fantasia will cease to exist. No idea, I don't write the rules; the Southern Oracle told me.



Speaking of the Ivory Tower, did you spot all the cameos in part I? Amongst them are E.T. (Steven Spielberg edited the US release), Chewbacca, Ewoks, Yoda, C-3PO, Gumby, a penguin, mermaid and Mickey Mouse. I'm not joking. Get the Blu-ray and zoom in on the internal crisis talks scene.

This original German-produced 1984 movie only covered the first half of the source material found in Michael Ende's 1979 novel so naturally, a sequel followed. Six years on the actors were considered too old for their roles and so all but Mr Koreander, the (supernatural?) book shop proprietor, were replaced.



(Bastian's father sees Mr Koreander's bookstore completely barren)

Bastian's Father: (to a policeman, furiously) There was no 'For Sale' sign this morning!

(he bangs on the door in fury)

Bastian's Father: This is one sophisticated operation, I'm telling you. This morning, this place was filled with books - wall to wall!

(the policeman looks inside)

Police Officer: Looks like there hasn't been a bookstore here for a long time. Are you sure this is the right address?

Bastian's Father: I am not the kind of person to make things up! Look, I'm an engineer, all right! What I see is what I see... when I...

(he's lost for words)

Police Officer: (leaves) We'll do what we can, Mr Bux.

(Bastian's father looks puzzled)

Barret Oliver who played Bastian Balthazar Bux mk1, daydreamer extraordinaire - a few years later giving up acting altogether to become a photographer - was swapped with Jonathan Brandis.



Bastian's Father: Do you know Bastian Bux?

Koreander: Do you ever know anybody?



Likewise, Dawson Leery's dad (you know, from Dawson's Creek?) joined the cast as Barney, Bastian's vacant dad who is forever reminding us, "I'm an engineer. I see what I see when I see it". Aww, bless him. He'll learn to believe when he's all grown up like Bastian.

Our other original lead, Noah Hathaway (Atreyu), doesn't appear to be feeling like his old self either. He's transformed into little-known actor, Kenny Morrison. Noah soon fell out with acting, instead turning to martial arts training and tattooing to pay the bills.



Bastian Bux: You saved my life, Atreyu.

Atreyu: Yes. But you would have done the same for me.

Bastian Bux: (after a pause) Sure.

When he's not him, and you're not you, and I'm not me, no wonder Bastian is so confused trying to grasp where his loyalties lie.

Bastian's Mother: (Nimbly is viewing a memory that Bastian just lost) Don't be afraid, Bastian. We are all a

part of a never-ending story.

Bastian Bux: We are? Even when we die?

Bastian's Mother: Yes, Bastian. We are.

Nimbly: (on the verge of tears) That's good to know.

Bastian's mum didn't need to be recast because she was already dead, that's mostly why the father-son relationship was so strained and distant.

Bastian Bux: You going out tonight?

Bastian's Father: Yeah, uh, technical sales staff seminar. Listen...

Bastian Bux: (sarcastically) Is Miss Station Wagon going to pick you up again?

Bastian's Father: Why do you say that?

Bastian Bux: (hesitates) The tie.

Bastian's Father: Oh, uh, yeah. Well, dressing is common courtesy, Bastian. I mean I - something you ought to learn, by the way. Look at that old rag you're wearing.

Bastian Bux: (feeling hurt from what he said) I like it!

Bastian's Father: Well, I don't.

Bastian Bux: Mom made it.

(His father stares at him)

Bastian Bux: (looking sad) You don't remember, do you?

(a car horn is heard)

Bastian's Father: Gotta go.

(His father quickly leaves)



Neverending Story II is loosely based on the second half of the novel, though is largely a rehash of the first movie. Where part one divided critical opinion, the second was almost universally panned and actually made a *loss* at the box office. Even more unfortunate, having been produced with a slightly higher budget; a \$36m investment yielded ticket sales amounting to \$17m. In contrast, Neverending Story accrued \$100m from a stake of \$27m (the most expensive movie produced outside the US at the time).

Rockbiter is back and has had a rock baby by this stage; Junior. No sign of the mother - that should tell you most of what you need to know.

Rockbiter Junior: (holds up a rock) Is that yum-yum rockie?

Two years on in Bastian's world he reacquaints himself with Mr Koreander while in search of a book on overcoming a lack of courage.

Bastian Bux: Mr Koreander?

Koreander: Huh?

Bastian Bux: Do you carry how-to books?

Koreander: How-to books? Does this place look like a supermarket? If you want advice on how to buy real estate or housebreak your goldfish, go to the video store down the street.

Trying out for the school swimming team is the impetus; daunted by the high diving board he flees the mortifying scene as unsympathetic laughter chases him into the changing rooms. A call-back to the first movie in which Bastian was too scared even to apply for the trials. Did you spot the foreshadowing? This is how Bastian returns to his own world having saved Fantasia, overcoming his acrophobia in the process.

Trainer: (Bastian won't jump off the high diving board) What's the matter?

Bastian Bux: I've got a cramp.

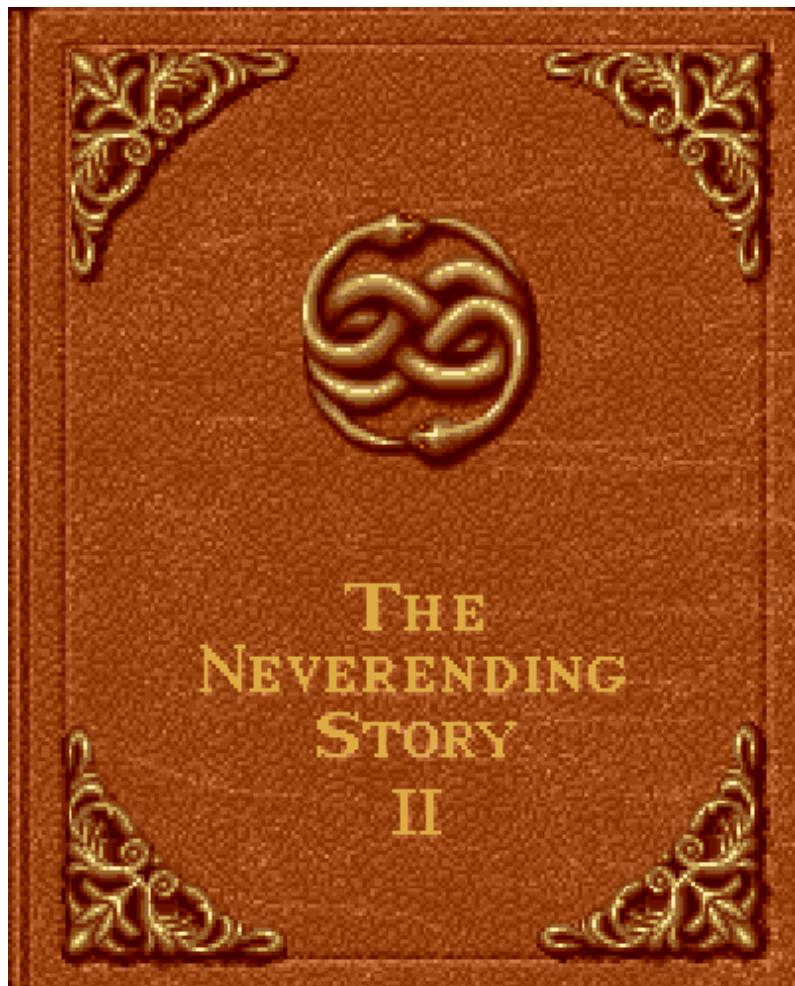
Trainer: High wimp factor, Bastian.

As contrived movie cliches would have it, Bastian stumbles across the same book from beyond, is driven to steal it once again, and before we know it he's lured back into the faraway world of Fantasia to be their saviour (yes, *again*).

In *our* world it's not quite so coveted; the iconic prop has been up for sale on eBay twice over the years. First listed at \$75,000 and later drastically reduced to \$28,500. On neither occasion did it sell. I doubt it was a charity auction then.

Bastian Bux: But it's 'The NeverEnding Story'. I've already read it.

Koreander: Ahh, but have you ever read a book twice? Books change each time you read them.



This time Fantasia is under threat from the menaces of evil sorceress Xayide, orchestrating its downfall from her hand-shaped 'Horok' castle. Despite sounding like a Muslim terrorist (Xayide's hijacked the president's plane, get Jack Bauer on the line!!!), she's considered the embodiment of the ethereal 'Nothing', otherwise known as the 'Emptiness', engendered through the collective dying imagination of the human species. Her nefarious scheme is to usurp the Childlike Empress and seize control of Fantasia, supposedly to bring order to the chaos of dreams, fluffiness and happy thoughts etc. You can't be too careful with all that guff! Actually, I think if you're not *already* depressed, you're not thinking about things hard enough, so she just needs to open people's eyes. ;)



Bastian is implored to stop Xayide in her tracks, once more safeguarding Fantasia, whilst she aims to thwart his efforts by destroying his precious memories in the hope he'll forget

why he's there... and likely end up in a home for the mentally infirm. Help me Bastian-wan, you're my only human!

Xayide: (watching the Ivory Tower, thinks) You're fighting a losing battle, Childlike Empress. Soon, your slick little castle will be as dark as mine.



Obviously you'll be wondering why she can't just kill him. Well, she needs Bastian to breach the Ivory Tower like a Trojan horse to dispatch the Childlike Empress, so he's more useful alive yet compliant like a trained puppy. Turning the dynamic duo against one another is all part of the plan...

Bastian Bux: She wants ME to have it. You don't understand anything. Why don't you just go back and play with your buffaloes, country boy!

Atreyu: Why don't you go back and play hero in your own world, Earthling!

Before we know it we've landed in Lord of the Flies territory...

Bastian Bux: (sees Falkor soaring in the dark skies carrying Atreyu's lifeless body) Atreyu, I didn't mean it! Falkor! ATREYU, I'M SORRY!

I don't know, give 'em an inch, and they take a mile...

The Childlike Empress: You have found the only wish powerful enough to save us, Bastian. The Emptiness cannot be destroyed; it had to be filled with love.

Bastian Bux: (takes off the Aurn and gives it to her) And Aurn?

The Childlike Empress: Is only a mirror of what's inside of you, Bastian. Courage comes from the heart; not from symbols.

This may be the finale, but you don't get off *that* easily, we have more plotage to cover. To loosen Bastian's resolve Xayide instructs one of her minions - known as Tri-Face for obvious reasons - to invent a sort of mechanical Steampunk device capable of transposing his wishes to memories encapsulated in marbles. I bet she'd been playing Kerplunk when she hit upon that brainwave! Nimbly, her bird-brained obsequious muppet-like assistant, is thus ordered to manipulate Bastian into making as many stupid wishes as possible using the Aurn amulet (gifted to Steven Spielberg after shooting wound up). He'll soon be as vacuous as all the humans who have stopped believing in fairies.



Falkor: Well, from what you tell me, the Emptiness has found its way into Bastian's head.

Atreyu: It's Auryn, isn't it? It works differently with humans than with us.

Falkor: Because humans need memories.

Atreyu: (goes stunned) So what I saw... was a memory!

Hindering Bastian further, Xayide commands an army of 'Giants', effectively hollow suits of armour what with her holding dominion over all that is empty. I think someone must have been watching ropey old episodes of Doctor Who when these rickety oddities were devised. They shamble awkwardly about the set like top-heavy graboid-crow fusions, seemingly posing little peril. If they started screeching EXTERMINATE! EXTERMINATE! EXTERMINATE! no-one would bat an eyelid.

Bastian Bux: (after trying to talk to giants) I like to read... you're probably not too interested in the subject. You

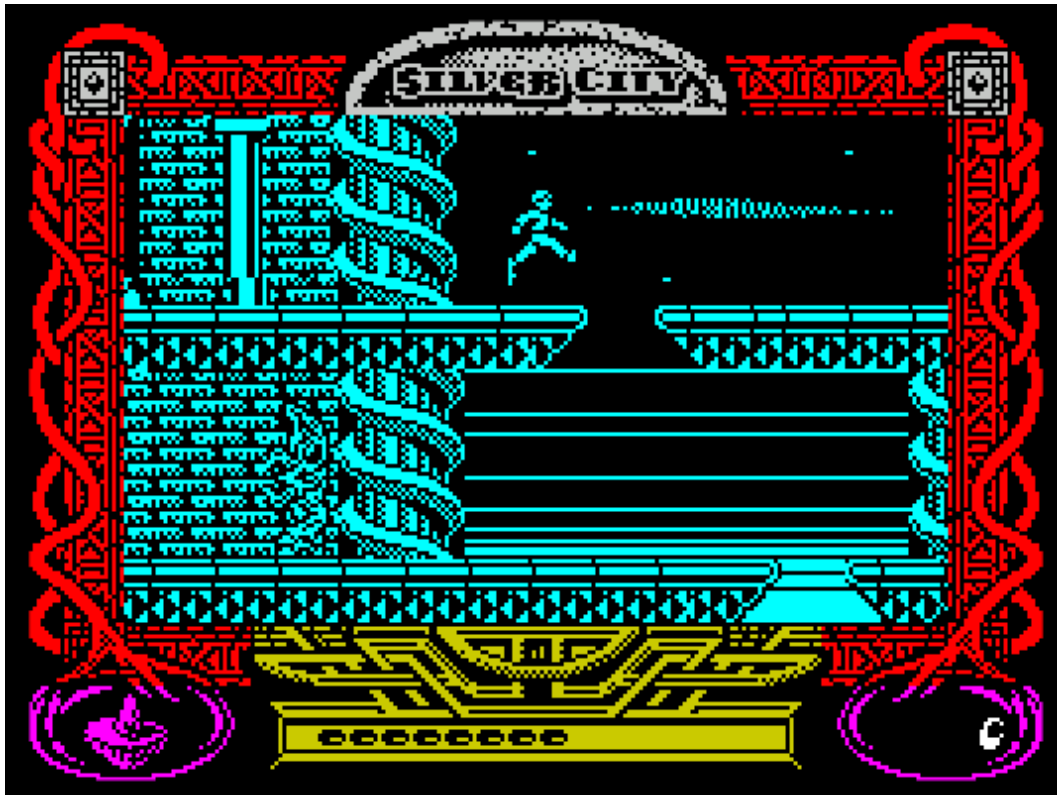
probably hate books!

(runs for his life)

As one of the few real baddies in the second movie aside from Xayide herself, naturally, they feature strongly in the Amiga game developed by Switzerland-based Linel.



Also available for the Commodore 64, DOS, and ZX Spectrum it should be noted. It's Amstrad counterpart was previewed, even *reviewed* in Amstrad Computer User magazine, then ultimately cancelled.



Largely the same uninspired multi-genre romp for all platforms, this comprises six separate arcade games adapted from key scenes found in the movie, bound together via animated pages from the all-important book. Along with a delightfully accurate rendition of Christopher 'Limahl' Hamill's iconic theme tune and digitised speech, the presentation between levels is impressive. That's despite what the dodgy spelling and grammar would lead you to conclude about the degree of attention to detail in evidence.

"Lots of nice graphics and variety in game styles - but much too difficult to play!"

Crash! (ZX Spectrum version, 74%, February, 1992)

Assuming you plod through it from start to finish without jumping between levels using passwords or a trainer the entire story is unravelled via a mixture of prose and animated

illustrations. In effect, you can follow all the nuances of its silver screen counterpart in a diluted fashion, if not the source material since the movie strays off the beaten path a fair bit.

So much so the author - Michael Ende - detested it, deriding director Wolfgang Petersen's interpretation as "revolting", a "gigantic melodrama of kitsch, commerce, plush and plastic". He wasn't overly impressed with the gratuitous sphinx statues either, referring to the topless, laser-eyed guardians as "quite one of the biggest embarrassments of the film". Ende even attempted to sue the movie's producers to have it disassociated with his far superior work. He failed, which explains why there's a Neverending Story III movie (starring Jason James Richter from Free Willy).

It's utterly horrendous, aside from giving us the opportunity to revel in a little-known early performance from Hollywood super-rock-star, Jack Black. Unsurprisingly it's a spin-off from the book, not something that was directly based on it.

Incidentally, Ste Cork, the programmer of the accompanying Neverending Story II DOS game felt equally incensed by his time spent with the movie translation, though mostly as a result of the conditions under which he had to work. To such an extent he deemed it necessary to bury a text rant in amongst the code.

"Another Ste Cork Creation, but what a sod to write!

Don't work for LINEL, it's lousy money, flies everywhere, the whole place stinks of s**t - human and cattle - there's NOTHING to do but work, no TV or anything, no pubs, nowhere to go, no car - despite what he tells you, you're always hungry, phoning home costs you nearly all your wages, if you need medical treatment you're in trouble

'cos you're working there without a permit, your wages are late EVERY month.

I could go on but I've only got 640k ram after all."

In the first two movies school bullies/peer pressure instigate Bastian's association with the charmed-cursed book. In part III the tyrannical too-old-for-school gang is made the chief harbinger of doom, reducing the grandiose gravity of finding oneself under the duress of an overarching negative concept to something dim-witted and entirely tangible. Even their name is ridiculous; 'The Nasties'. Well, no more ridiculous than 'The Nothing' or 'The Emptiness' to be fair I suppose. Hmm.

Still, if you cherish your memories of the inventive Neverending Story characters you met back in the '80s as an impressionable young child you'll absolutely abhor what the movie sausage machine did with this instalment! If this slapstick abomination is the producers' retort to Vincent Canby's barbed "humourless" comment concerning the first movie, he has a lot to answer for! Technically he was right, you'd have to work very hard to wring any laughs out of the first movie. Bastian took it all very seriously, it was an intense life-changing experience, so there you go.

Thankfully no follow-up game was developed based on the atrocity that was part III so we'll get back to the current one courtesy of TV-movie director, George T. Miller.

Relatively speaking, the B movie on which this is based is actually bearable, largely thanks to a terrific performance from Jonathan Brandis. Tragically he spiralled into bouts of chronic depression and committed suicide in 2003 so we'll never see how his promising career might have evolved.

Meanwhile, part III is running while I type... I'm watching it with about a third of one eye and still feel I need to wish away hazardous reawakened memories that would be best left to wane. Bastian makes a total of 33 in the second movie and that's sufficient to empty his head, so it shouldn't take too long to root these out.

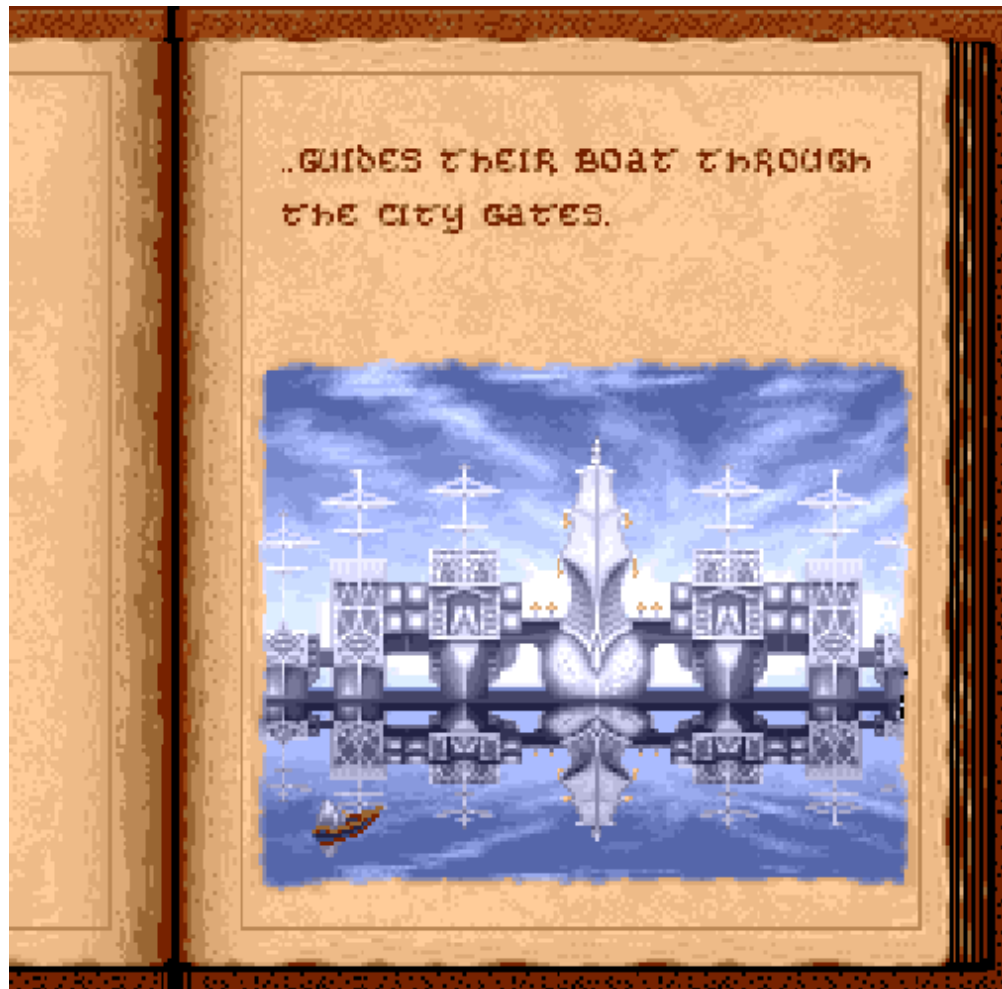
Atreyu: Bastian made a wish, didn't he?

Falkor: He gave up a very special memory.

Atreyu: (to Bastian) Your mother would've been proud.

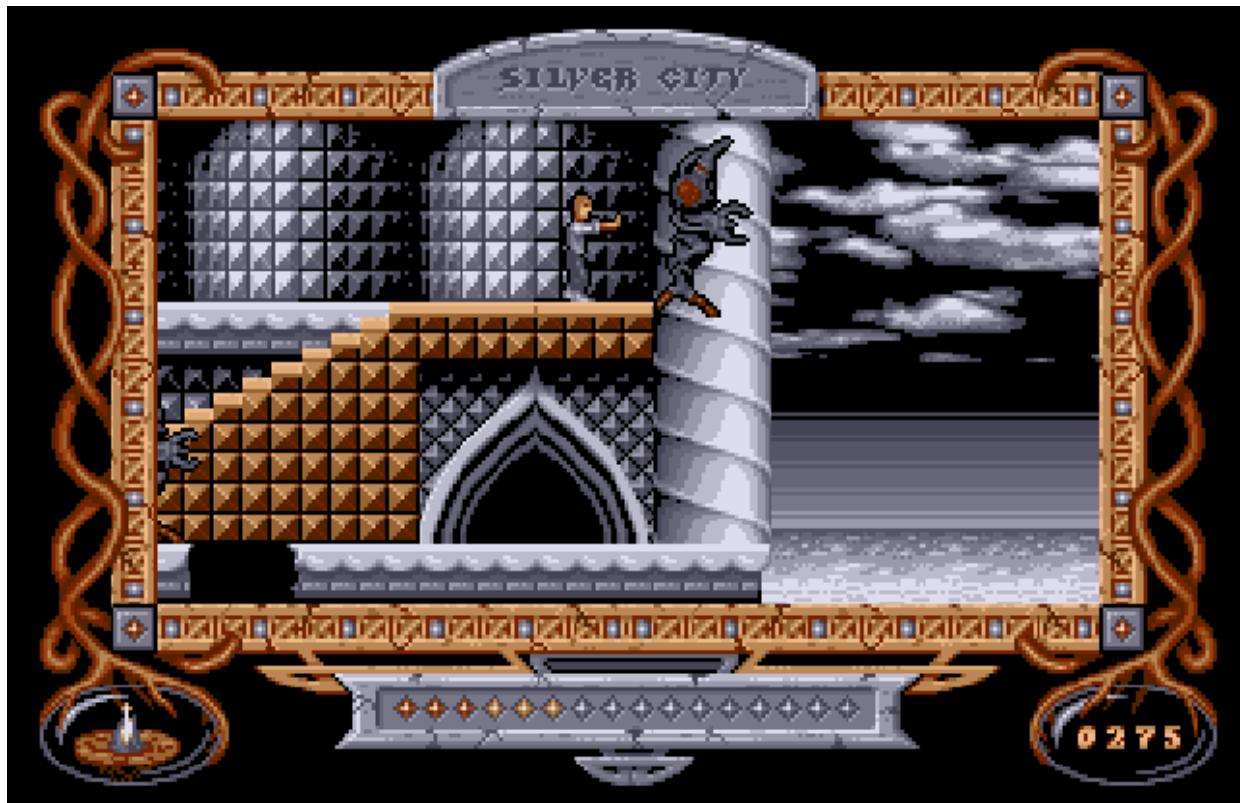
Bastian Bux: (confused) Who?

Atreyu: Falkor, you shouldn't have let him!



Playing as Bastian we begin our journey having arrived in Silver City via a catamaran, inserting a fairly critical barrier between us and the acid lake beneath. If only it was as weak as the gameplay we might have been able to swim! Instead we run, jump, climb stairs and deviously push the talon-balancing Giants into gaping chasms when their backs are turned, allowing us to continue on our way.

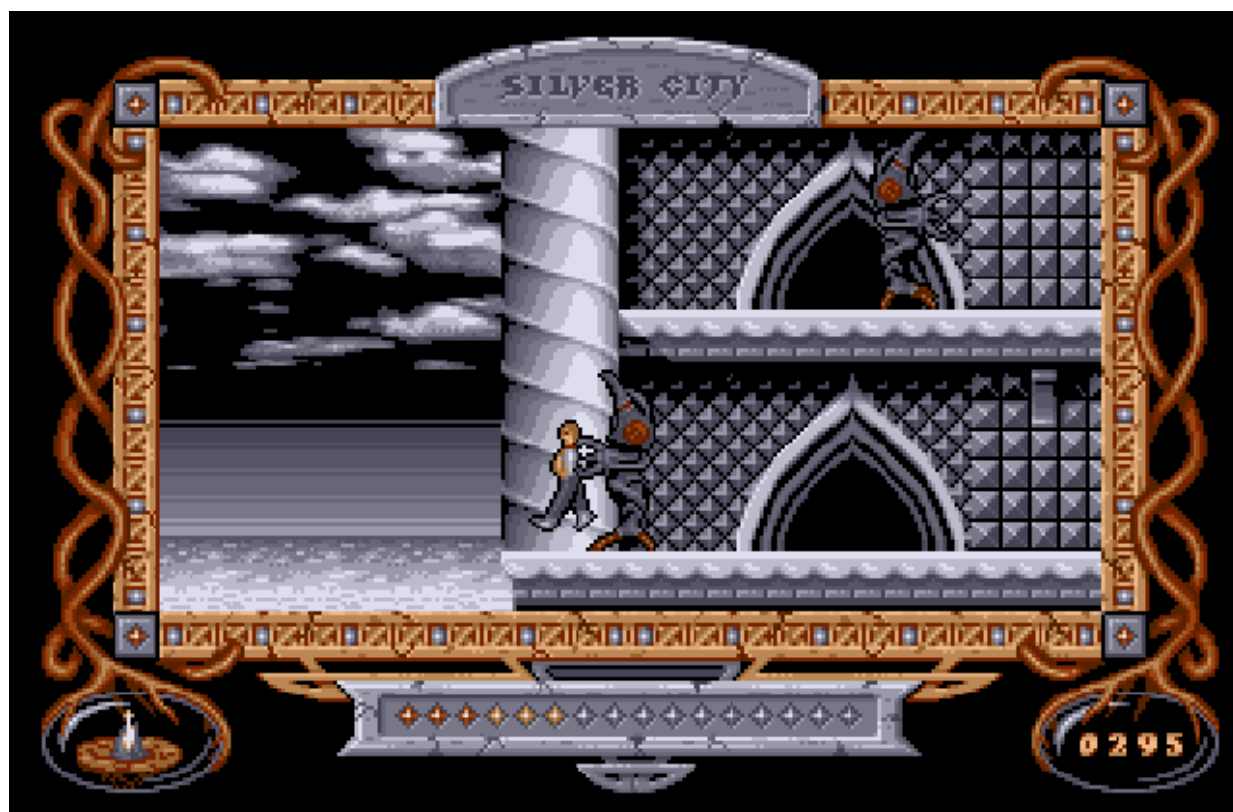
All we do to accomplish this is wait until they are positioned perilously close to the edge of a platform and then run into them. Bastian will automatically shove them over.



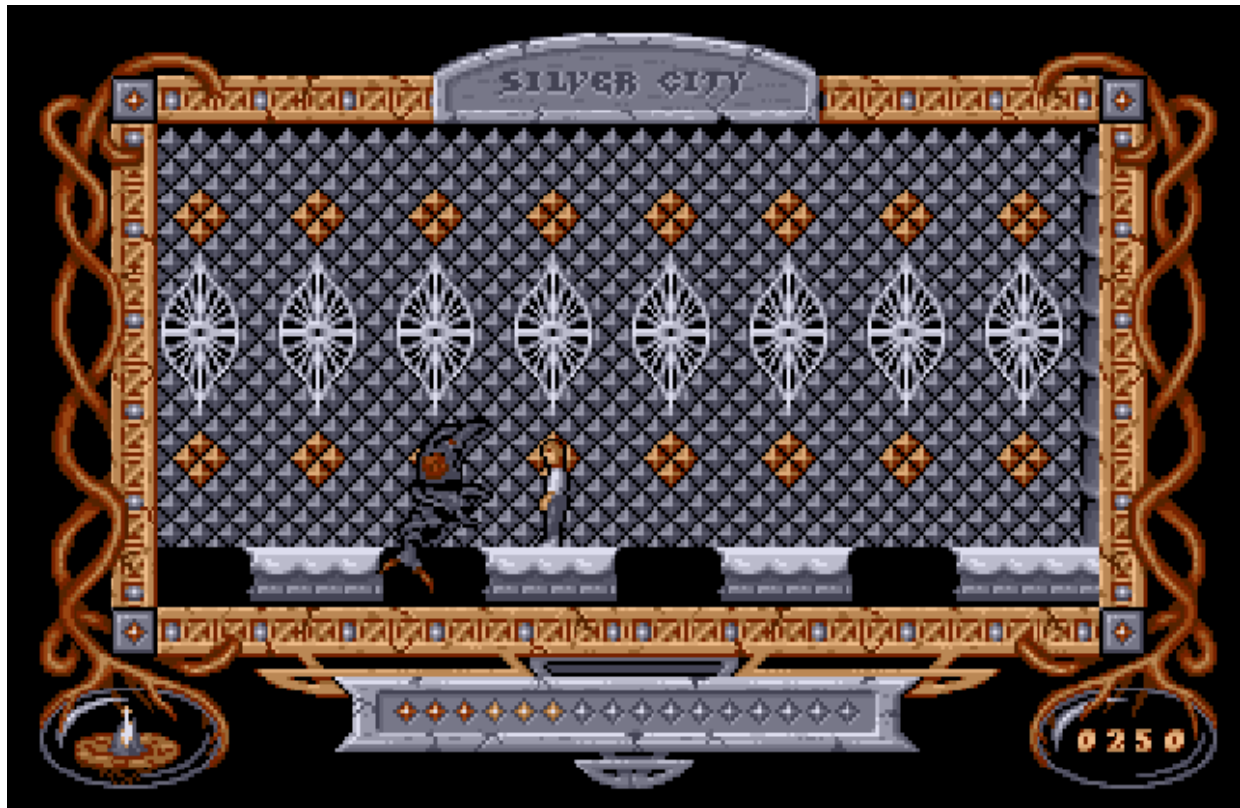
Mudwart: You've just taught some giants how to swim, earthling.



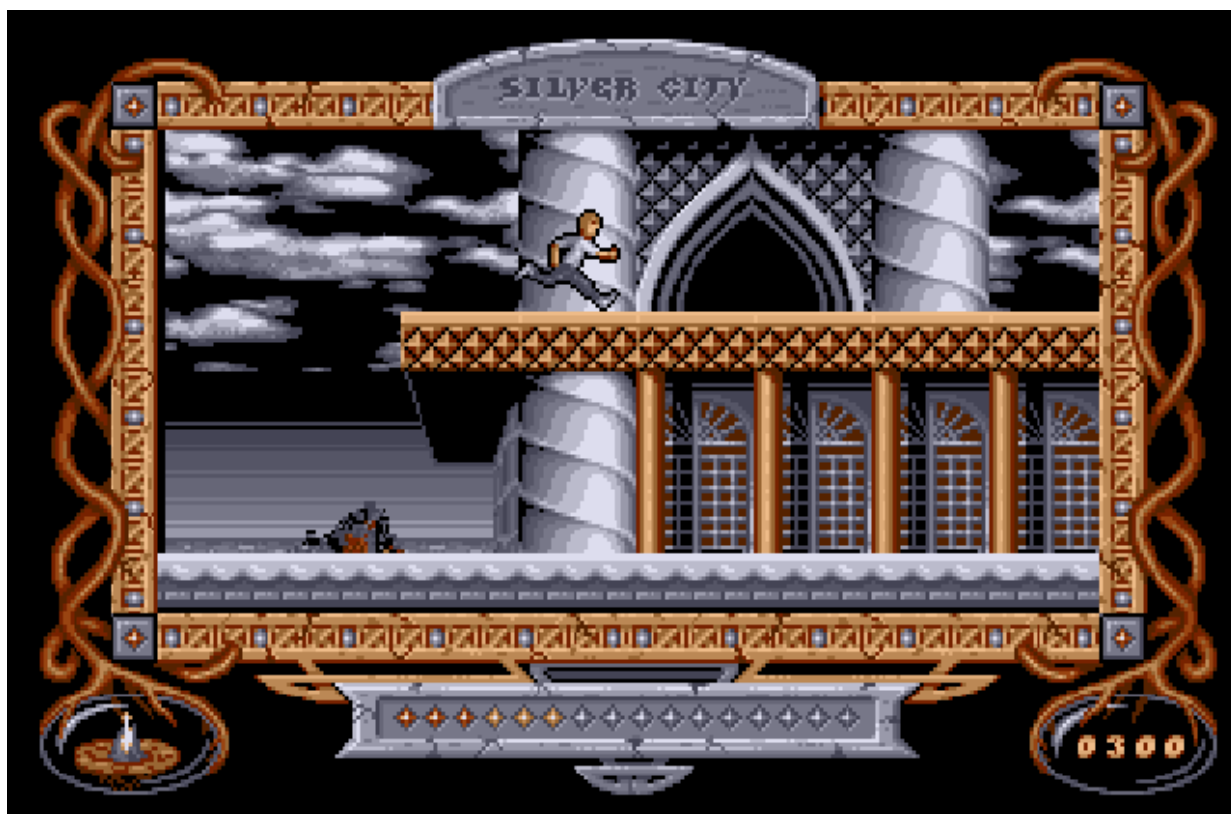
With no weapons at our disposal, this is as good as it gets - remember, in the first movie Atreyu is instructed to leave his weapons behind when agreeing to embark on the quest to save the Childlike Empress, so that makes perfect sense. The Giants are pretty air-headed (hoho, haha), barely alert to our existence unless we walk right up to them and shout, "here I am, grab me you lump of useless metal".



They'll even walk blindly into black holes of their own accord if they spy us on the other side.



If there's a gap in an upper platform, but something below to break their fall, they'll crumple into a pile of empty armour instead.



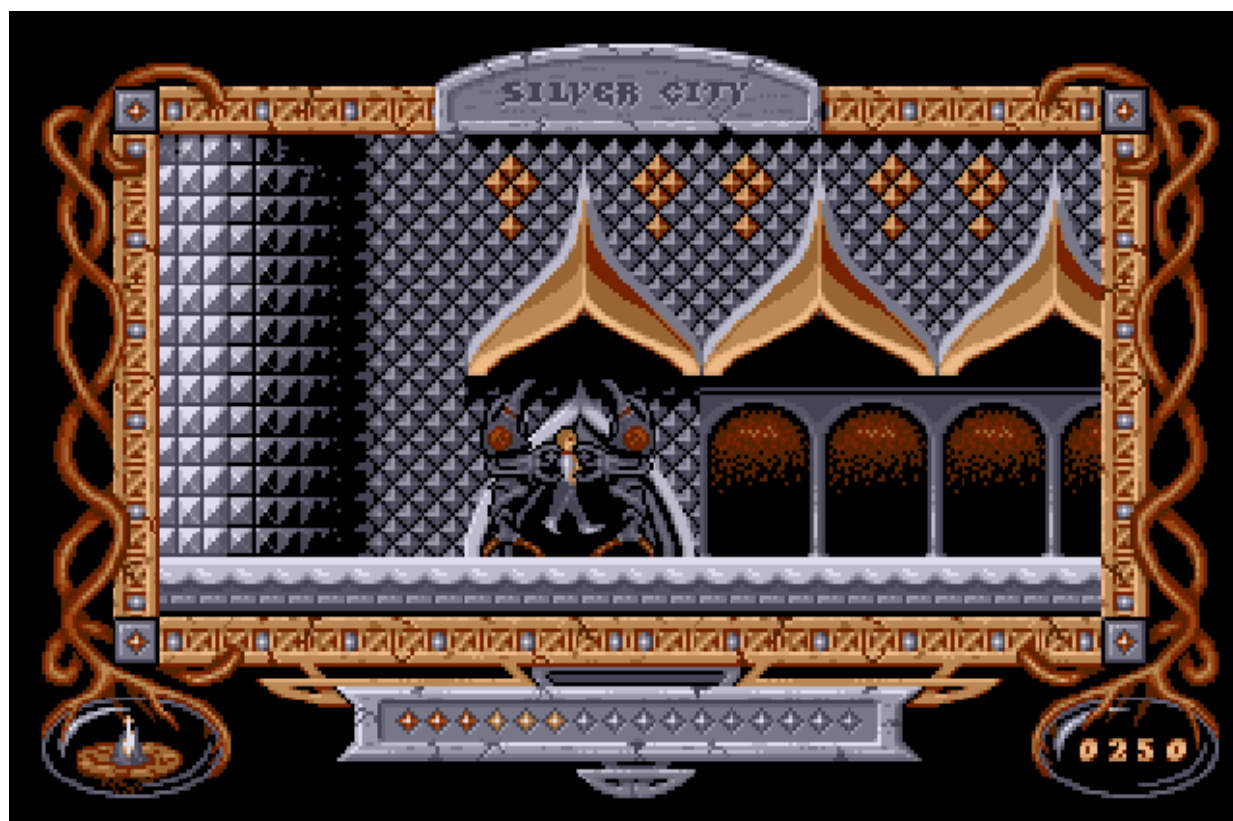
"When I first started playing, NES2 was heading for an 'It's A Corker!', but I'm sure most gamers could crack it in one day. In this case I suggest that you might buy it if you're completely crap at games, or are looking for something to keep your kid brother or sister occupied - for a while."

Commodore Format (58%, October, 1991)

This level has to be the most interesting and well designed in the game in that it has an unexpected, challenging puzzle element weaved into the standard platforming action. Given that we have no weapons with which to defend ourselves, the Giant threat can only be neutralised when they're in a very specific location, totally beyond our control. You'd imagine it would be infuriating... and it is!

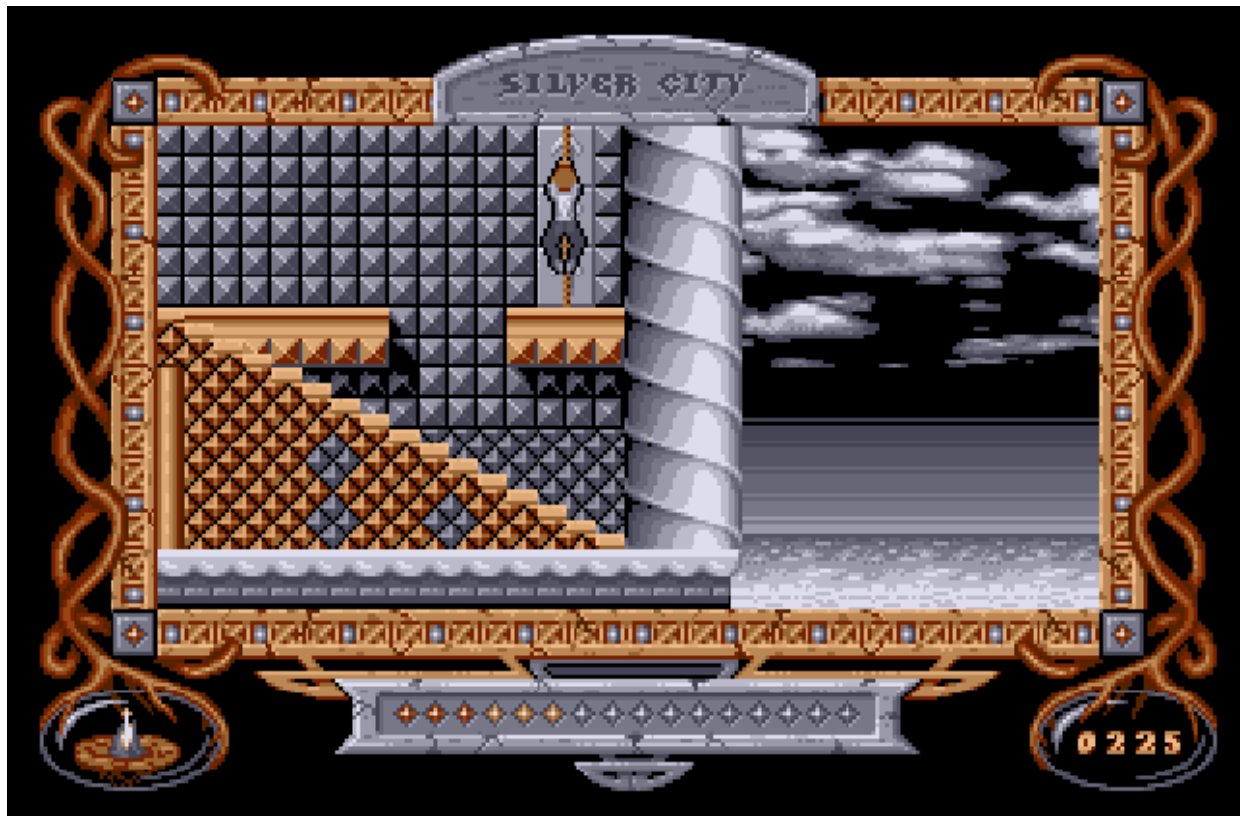
If we're caught between two mindless zombies converging upon us we're doomed unless there's a convenient archway

to escape through. These can either whisk us away to safety, or drop Bastian into the midst of another perilous tryst. Use them effectively and we can dip out of a terminal collision course scenario, wait for the threat to pass then return when the coast is clear.



Stairs can also be used to our advantage seeing as the Daleks, er... I mean *Giants*, can't comprehend how they operate. If we hold back momentarily allowing them to pass by we can return to level ground and run in the opposite direction to reach a previously blocked platform or exit.

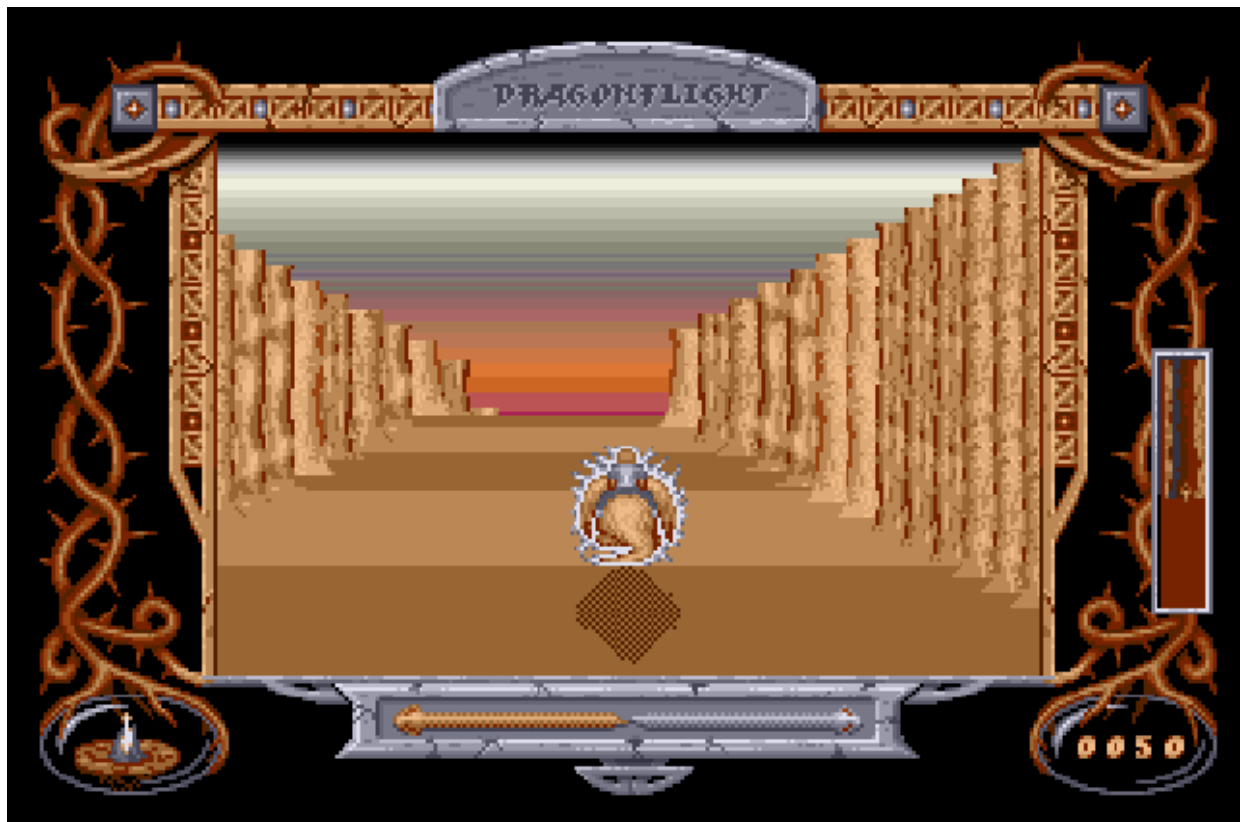
All in all it's a devious juggling act demanding precision timing and patience.



Our goal is to avoid or trick the Giants into clearing a path to the exit, consisting of a rope leading to the boat on which we meet Windbridge and Atreyu who explain the dilemma we're here to address. Then it's onto the flying Falkor stage (once we've scratched his itch - I'm not going to explain the creepy paedophile cut of this scene, you'll have to Google it).



This is marginally more impressive - a 3D race through Fantasia's desert canyons in pursuit of Smerg, the fire-breathing dragon Bastian disastrously conjures to life via a wish. This is his misguided solution to the conundrum of reaching Xayide's lair without a plane ticket.



Bastian Bux: I wish for the most horrifying flying dragon in the history of Fantasia!

(as he's speaking, the dragon slowly appears behind him)

Bastian Bux: I wish him to be red. No, no, green! I wish he can fly as fast as the concord and stink so bad that he makes us sick. And he breathes fire. I'll call him Smurg.

Nimbly: Maybe you should wish for some modifications.

Bastian Bux: (turns around and sees the dragon) Oh, no!

Xayide: (watching from her castle) Oh, yes!

Rather than serving as a benevolent steed, he goes rogue, threatening to terrorise Fantasia. Bastian must contain the

outbreak, urgently hurtling after his wish-fulfilment riding on Falkor's back.

Bastian Bux: (after the dragon has escaped) What are we gonna do?

Atreyu: Chase it!

Falkor: Chase? Did somebody say chase?





For a long time, there's no sign of the tearaway monster, leaving us to amuse ourselves by bouncing between the tree trunk-like walls and floor of a narrow channel rat-run as we attempt to sustain our limited energy reserves.

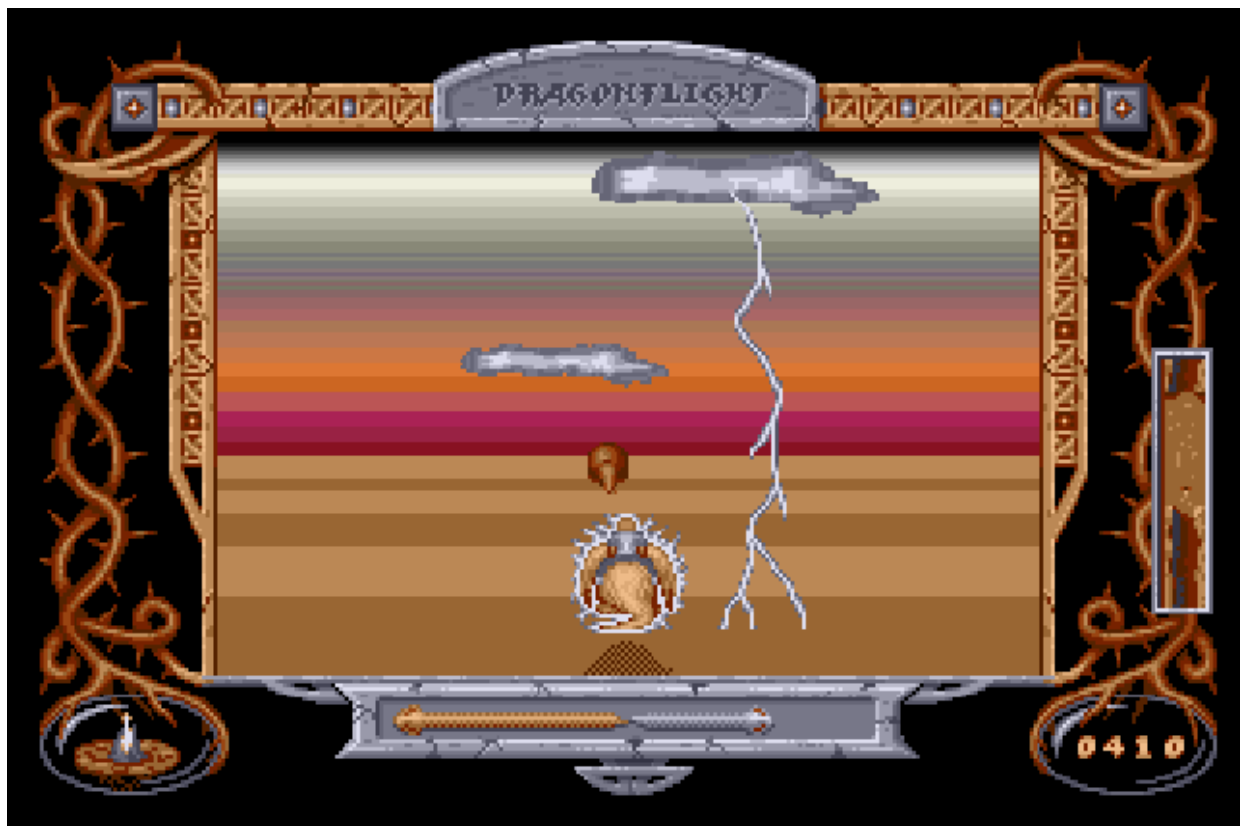
Initially, there are no obstacles to dodge or enemies to fight so you may struggle to stay awake. When Smereg eventually materialises, the purported rampaging dragon more closely resembles a flying armadillo and poses little threat. Bringing about his demise entails ramming the indistinct blob against the walls until he dies of boredom and skulks off to do something more interesting.



Not quite how it (literally) went down in the movie...

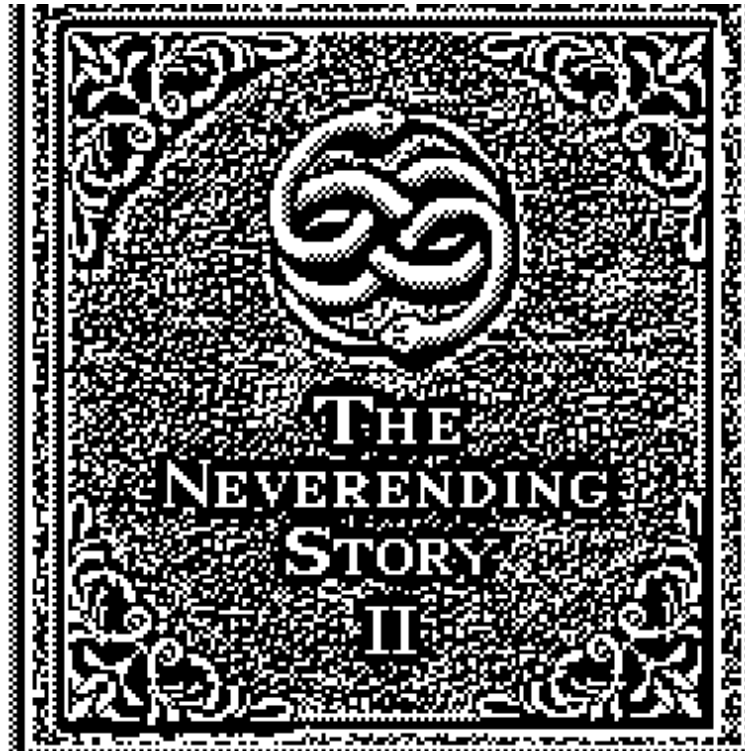
Bastian Bux: (when Smerg is hit by a fire arrow from Horok) Smerg got zapped!

In-between bouts we surface from the tunnel into a desert clearing where we dodge (or absorb) lightning strike charges shot from low lying clouds, depending on the speed of our reflexes. What's odd is that we're electrically charged even before reaching this section; every time we hit a hard surface we sizzle as though strapped into 'Old Sparky' living on borrowed time.

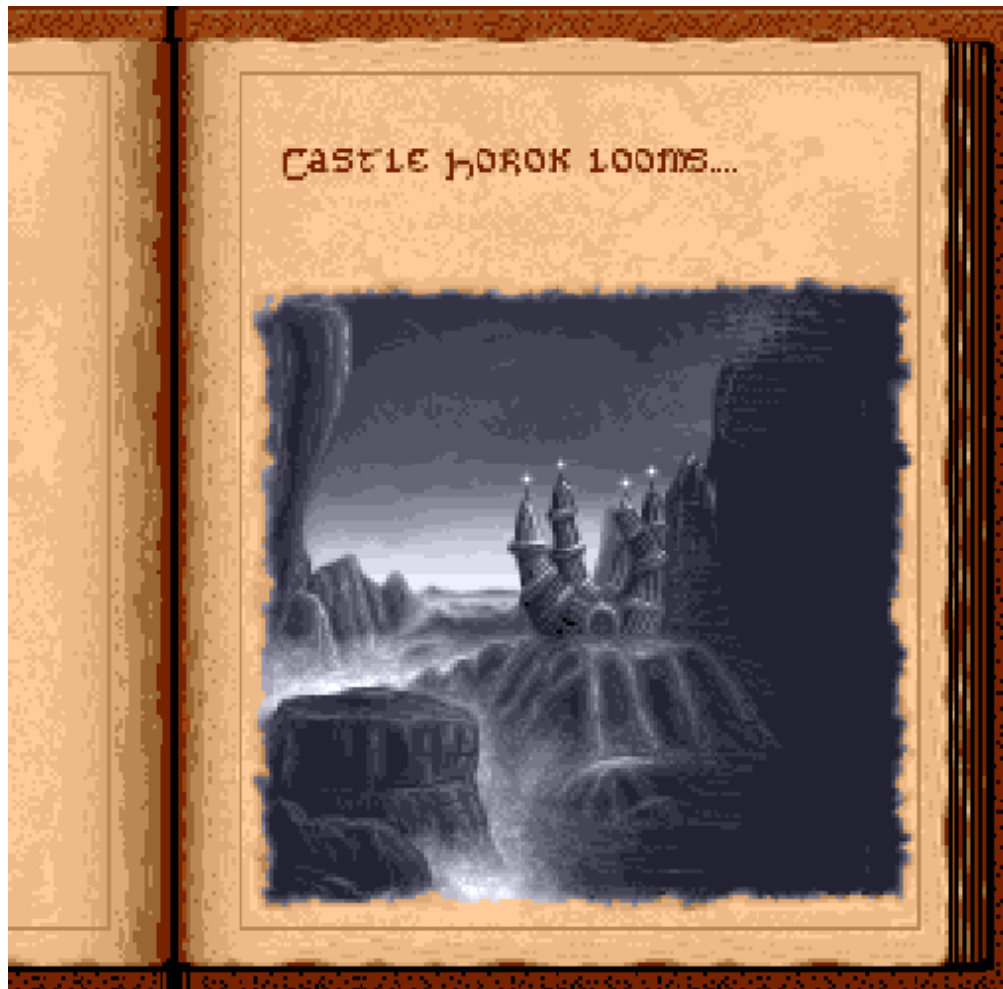


"So, what have we got? Well, the graphics are nice, and stand out well despite the detailed backgrounds. There's a fair bit of tension as you sprint along, never sure if a nasty is going to pop out of the ground in front of you, but the trouble is, the game doesn't really grab your attention. There's really nothing to get the old gameplayer's juices flowing and, to put it bluntly, it's dull as heck. Even with the extra features and viewpoints of the later levels, we've seen it all before. If you're into the whole NES phenomena you could conceivably have a jolly time, but for those of us after a thundering good game I'm afraid that it's time to look elsewhere."

Your Sinclair (ZX Spectrum version, 40%, May, 1992)



With Smereg taken care of, it's onto Horok Tower where we must scale the walls to rescue Atreyu, who rather inconveniently happens to have been captured and is currently dangling over the tower's precariously steep, winding staircase via a chain fastened around his waist.



If we leap over its looming defences and free Atreyu we'll be a formidable (haha) tag team once more.



With his help, Bastian will soon get the chance to confront Xayide and ask her nicely to stop being so naughty. He's a mighty "warrior from the Great Plains" remember, despite looking like a kid attending a 10-year old's fancy dress party.

In the movie, Bastian wishes for foot grips to eject from the castle wall allowing him to ascend it one step at a time. Initially, his pleading for a way up results in about a dozen of these appearing. Each jutting climbing hold thereafter is another wish used, and another memory lost to the ether. Well, technically Xayide's memory gumball vending machine.

Bastian Bux: (climbing up the castle wall) I wish for another step! And another one! And another!

In the gaming equivalent, many of these footholds are already in place, leaving Bastian to plug any gaps impeding his progress. We possess a limited amount of supports and they can be deployed at will until depleted. Then he's stuffed with nowhere to go. Falkooooooooor?!?!?

A further challenge is levied by the need to clamber across these holds evading collision with falling boulders...



...or being knocked off our perch by unexplained explosions.



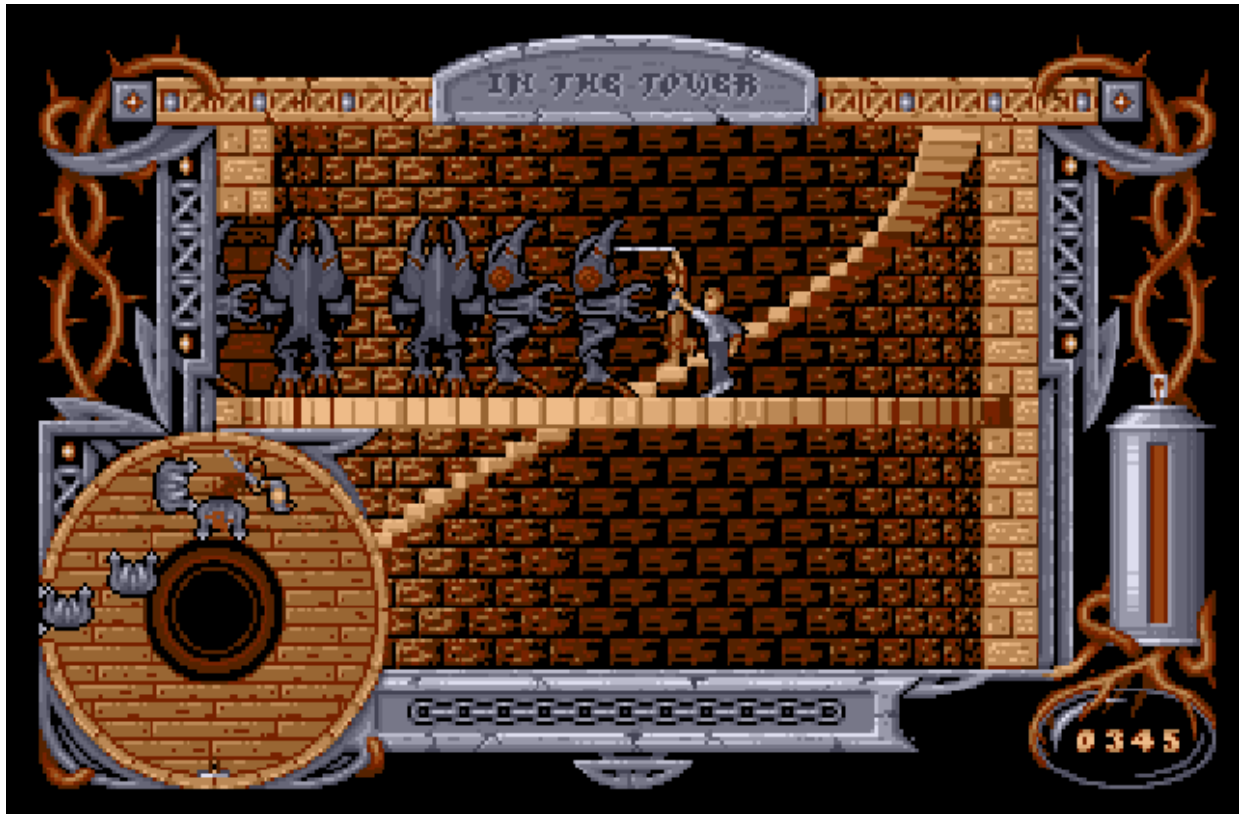
Our playfield encompasses half the screen, with the remainder dedicated to an artistic, monochrome vista of the tower. A shifting pointer depicting our progress serves as motivation.

"The Neverending Story fails, mainly because the individual arcade sequences within the main framework are half-witted and badly designed. The graphics are inconsistent throughout. The animation on the main character is laughable, while the parallax scrolling on level 5 and 3D canyons on level 2 are almost applaudable. The gameplay and control methods, however, remain dire throughout, thus leading to utter frustration. Add to this the seemingly useless abundance of disk access between the loss of a life and level advancement and you've got one game I'd most definitely avoid."

Amiga Action (39%, March, 1992)



Once inside Horok Tower Atreyu is automatically emancipated; together we make our descent to the base, reverse Tower Toppler style. You may know it better as 'Nebulous', a far better name. As in the movie Bastian wishes for a can of spray paint of all potential weapons. Deploying this limited resource we join forces with Atreyu (armed with a whirling chain) in dispatching the bumbling Giants cluttering up the staircase.



Atreyu: We need weapons.

Bastian Bux: I wish for... a spray can!

(a can appears in his hand)

Atreyu: That's a weapon in your world?

Bastian Bux: Yeah. People use it against walls.

Atreyu: Those walls must be dangerous.

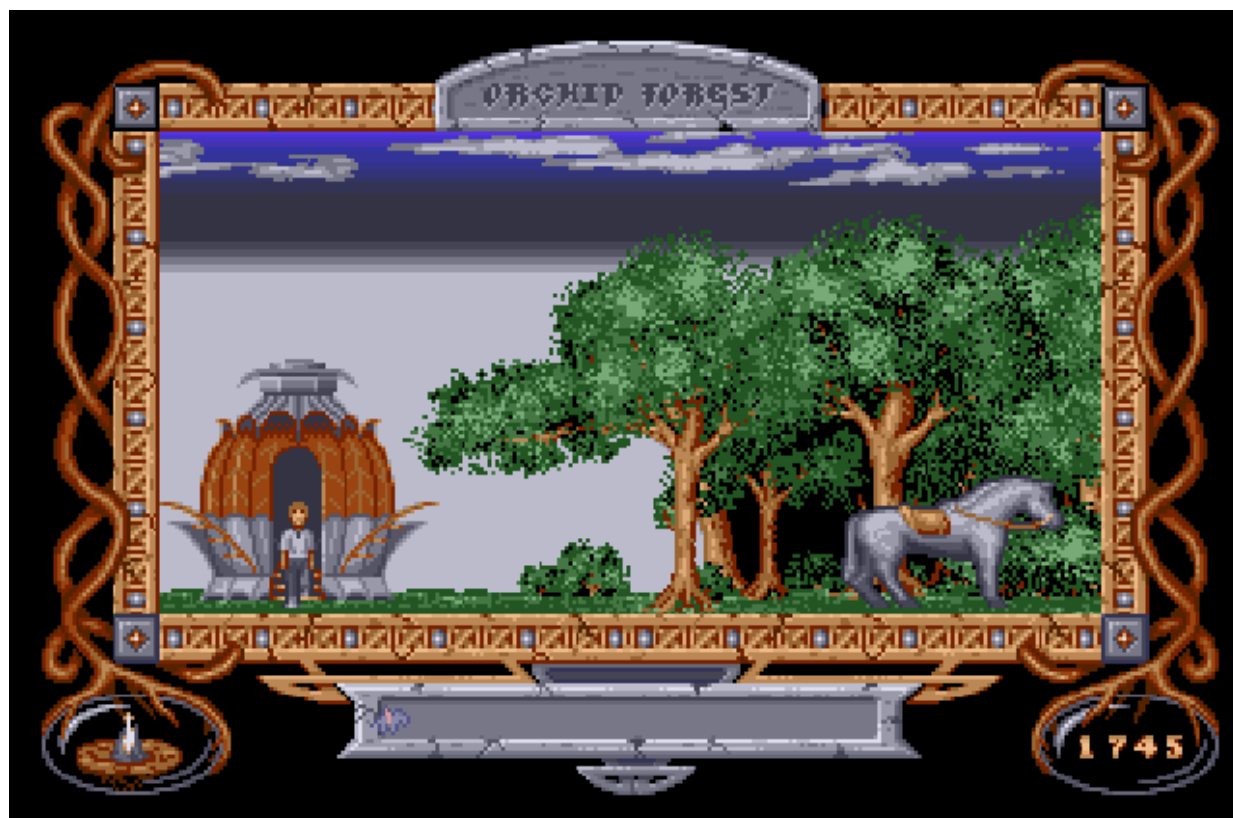
They don't so much die as become dizzy and tumble over the precipice, allowing us to proceed to the base, every step synchronised as though starring in a cheap Hammer Horror flick presented in Jerkovision. It's actually hypnotic if you watch it for long enough!



To enable us to align with the Giants and improve aiming accuracy an overhead view is displayed in the bottom left corner of the screen. All that on-the-spot river dancing isn't supposed to distract the Giants, it's Bastian moving between the unseen planes of the seemingly 2D view. It'll make sense if you give it a whirl yourself.



She explains that she's one of the good guys really, deep down. Honest. And that to assist his mission it would be an honour to transport Bastian to the Childlike Empress' Ivory Tower in her 'Xobile'. A flying orb-shaped carriage similar to the one seen in Cinderella, only without the wheels or horses.



Atreyu insists she's fibbing, Bastian double-insists *he's* fibbing about *her* fibbing, leading to theatrical fisticuffs and Atreyu's accidental death. Don't worry, he can be revived with Bastian's final wish later.



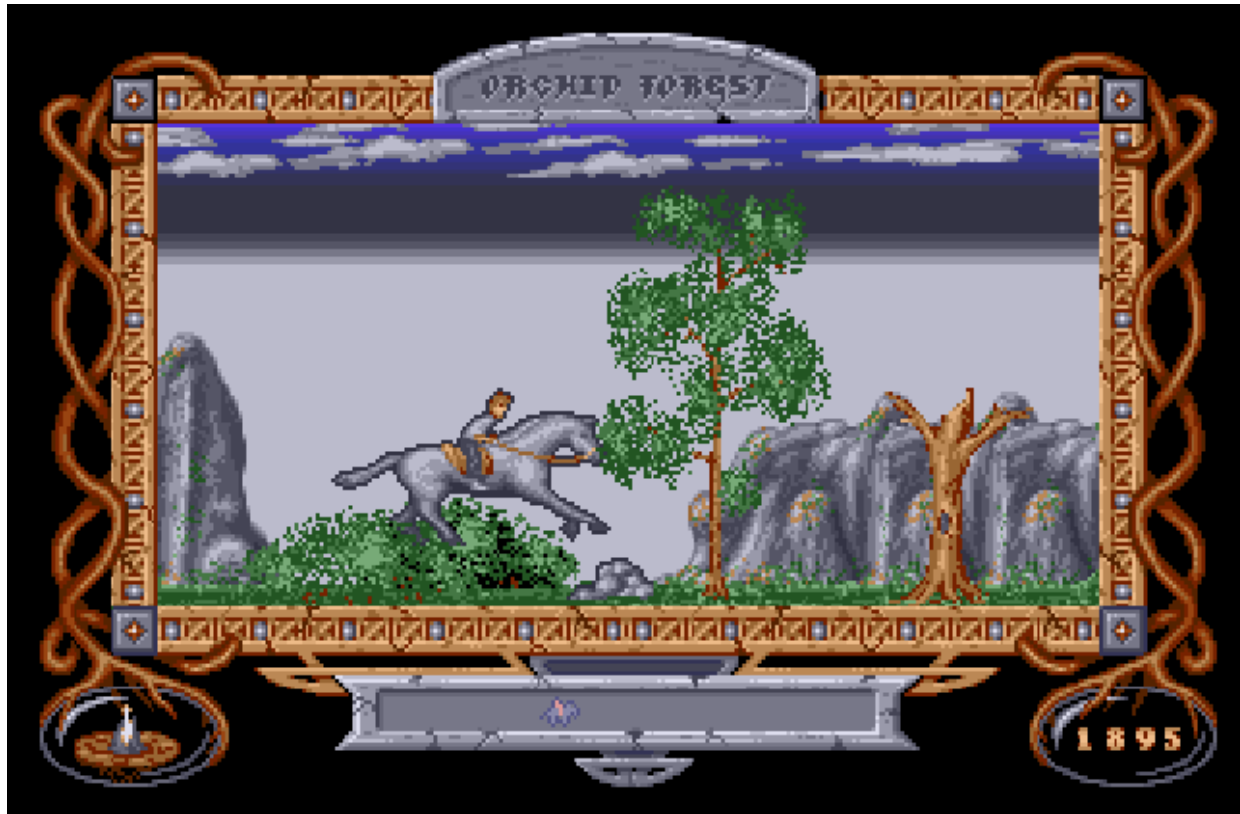
When Bastian learns the truth for himself he has a paddy and ditches the queen, slipping away from her clutches on a more low-tech getaway vehicle.

"Most people realised ages ago that these bitty multi-part film license affairs don't come off - nobody wants seven crummy games for the price of one good one. A shame because The Neverending Story concept is ideal fodder for a computer game - it's just that nobody seems able to pull it off. You can do much better than this."

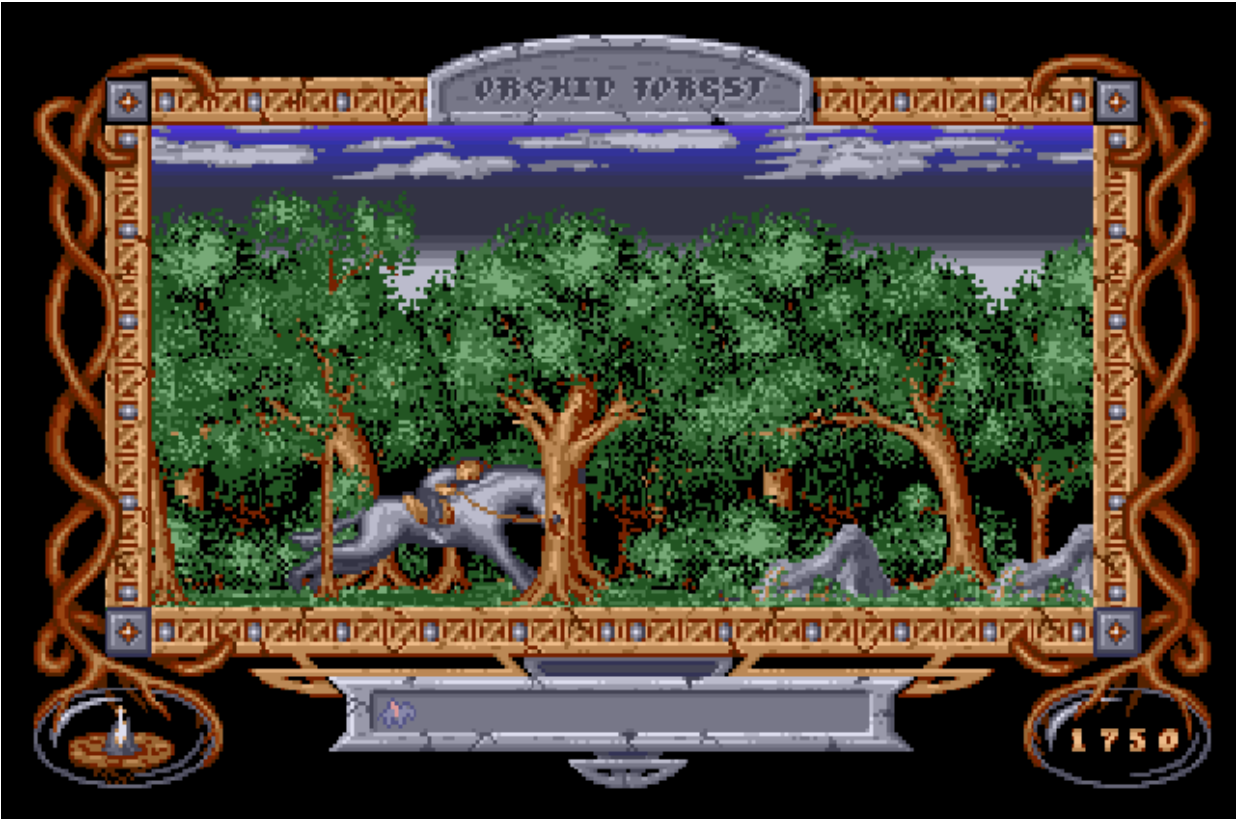
Amiga Power (42%, February 1992)

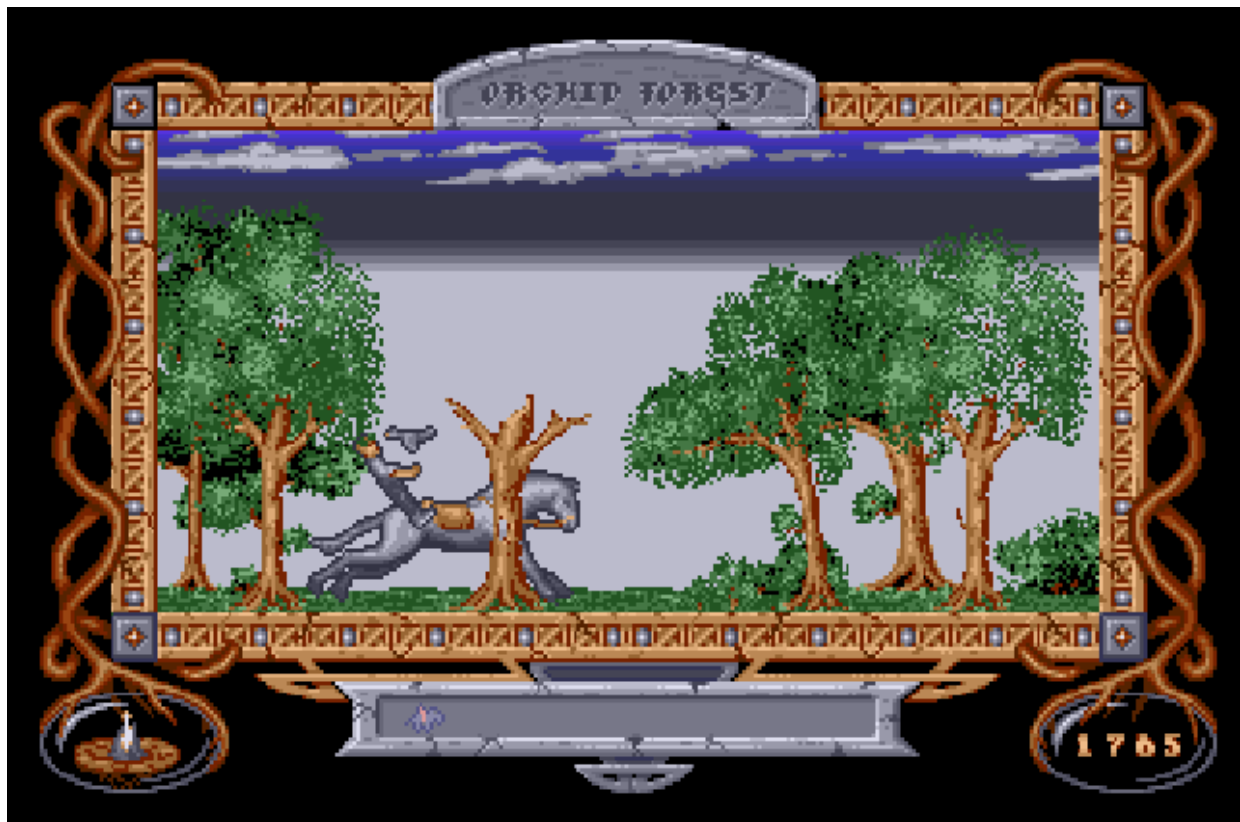
Next on the agenda, we must ride Atreyu's horse, Artax, through the forest orchard, because that's a genre we've not

dabbled with yet. This is very similar to the galloping horse level in Back to the Future III. Obstacles such as logs and rocks must be jumped...



...others - tree branches and birds - ducked under in an effort to stay upright.





Jumping is actually automated, all you have to do is push right just before the obstacles appear under Artax's feet to remain upright. Consequently, we're left with very little to do, feeling a bit out of the loop.

Bastian's Father: (reading that Bastian has mounted and attempted to direct Artax) My son on a horse? He can't ride a horse!

Survive long enough and we're rewarded by being hauled off Artax by Xayide's plasma hand spell.







You might like to experiment with the x-rated (gasp!) cheat/Easter egg to see the alternative variant of this scene. I've already captured it in my 'unexpected nudity' video if you'd like to check that out instead.

We plummet down a waterfall landing in the seething river beneath, where we must swim downstream to safety, battling the current and swerving boulders/whirlpools. Keep swimming until you see a branch jutting out into the ravine - that's our escape route.



As already alluded to this mimics the scene in the movie in which Bastian is clued in on the existence of the memory machine and Xayide's unscrupulous dissembling...

Nimbly: (after Bastian leaves to get to Falkor) Who told the boy?

Tri Face: It's all Nimbly's fault! He's always hanging around the machine!

Nimbly: (sarcastically) Oh, thanks for nothing! It's always nice to have someone you can count on!

Xayide: I do the counting around here.

(Nimbly squawks at Tri Face in anger)

Tri Face: No, it's your fault!



Xayide: One...

(Bastian gets ready to jump the cliff with Artax)

Xayide: ...two...

(she rises her hand and unleashes energy)

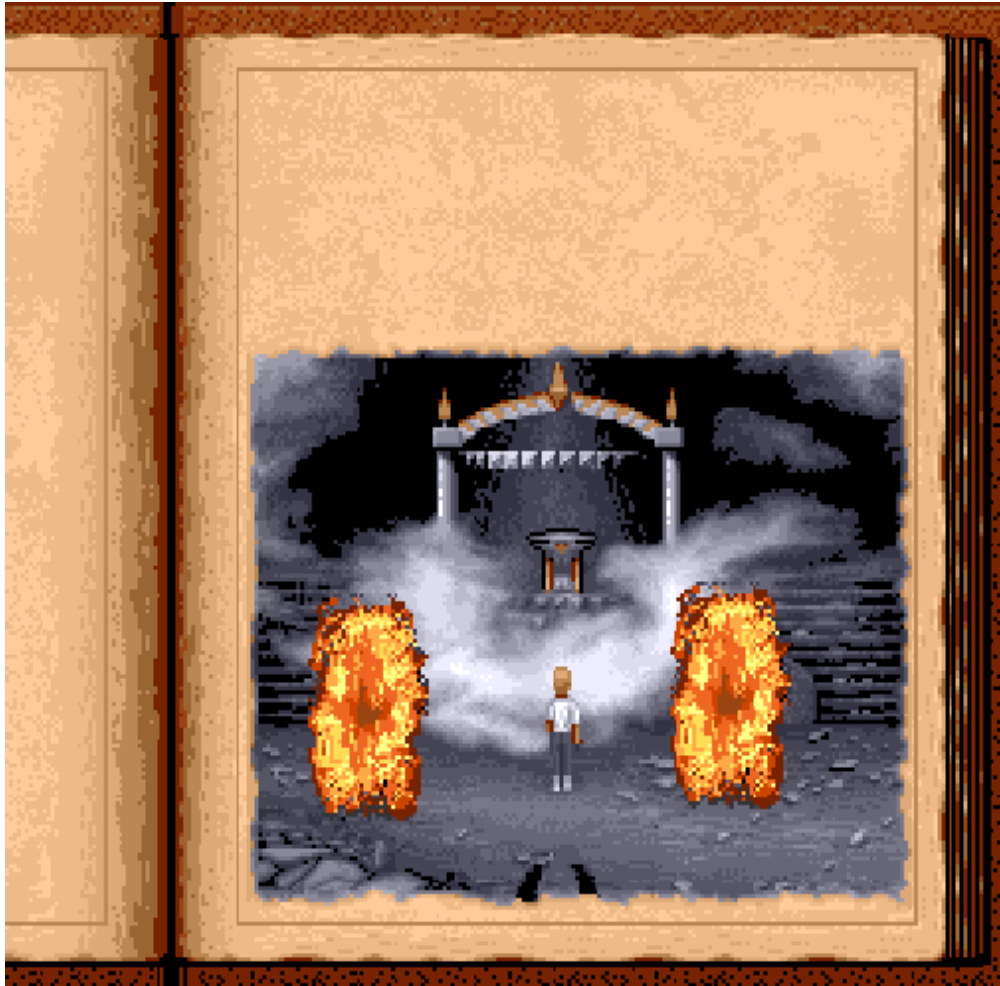
Xayide: ...THREE!

(she sends her energy at Bastian making him fall in the raging river)

Returning full circle to Silver City we prepare to finally confront the purveyor of melancholy and misery herself, Xayide. Engaging her in conversation to query why she's such a nasty piece of work we must select from one of three text responses. If you watched the movie you'll know that Bastian wishes she had a heart, one instantly swells in her chest and suddenly implodes along with her empty

underlings, unaccustomed as she is to feeling the intensity of raw human emotion.



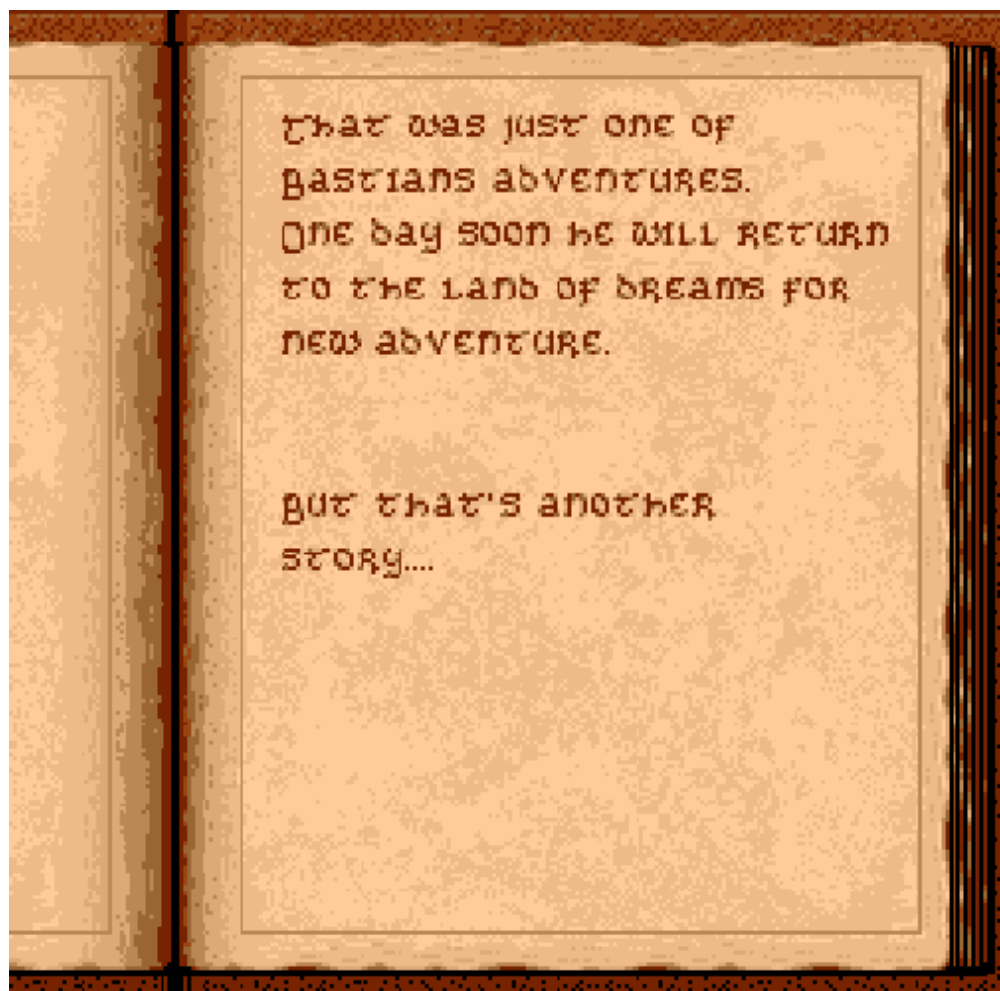


The Ende.

Bastian Bux: (holds up a hand) Give me five.

Atreyu: Five what?

Bastian Bux: Forget it.



Wow! Was it really worth the pain of all those floppy-chugging post-death reloads? Considering its primitive in-game graphics, AWOL sound effects, initially impenetrable controls, and the dull, repetitive assortment of mini-games on offer, the logical answer would be an emphatically corporeal NO! Then again *something* kept me plugging away until I'd beaten it, so either Neverending Story II isn't totally repugnant, or the Childlike Empress was pulling my strings remotely from Fantasia, driven by a Tenacious D-rive for self-preservation.

Assuming you can fathom out how to perform some of the more obscure, crucial manoeuvres, and possess the patience of a saint, the internal tower and giant-slaying segments are

bordering on well designed - and dare I say it? - *innovative*. If *they* fail to compel you to leap feet first into the land of pulp fiction, the remaining diversions will be no more appealing than your average, tedious, flash game time-waster.

One would assume that it was the movie production company, CineVox Film, who approved Linel's license to adapt the IP. Given Michael Ende's loathing of the enchanting, albeit flawed, first movie I suspect he'd consider Linel's endeavours a further perverted descent into the desecration of his boundless, surreal escapism. A granite tricycle-wreck even.